EPA-PNL-1361

Phil North/R10/USEPA/US
08/31/2012 03:11 PM

To Heather Dean
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: A little perspective from 1892

Phillip North
Environmental Protection Agency
Kenai River Center
514 Funny River Road
Soldotna, Alaska 99669
(907) 714-2483
fax 260-5992
north.phil@epa.gov

"To protect your rivers, protect your mountains."
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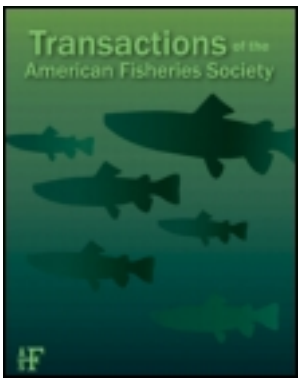
From: Phil North/R10/USEPA/US
To: Jeff Frithsen/DC/USEPA/US, Barbara Butler/CI/USEPA/US@EPA, Caroline Ridley/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Glenn Suter/CI/USEPA/US@EPA, Jason Todd/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Jim Wigington/COR/USEPA/US@EPA, Joe Ebersole/COR/USEPA/US@EPA, Kate Schofield/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Palmer Hough/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Rachel Fertik/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Rebecca Aicher/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, Richard Parkin/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Sheila Eckman/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Dennis McLerran/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Bill Dunbar/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Marianne Holsman/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Cara Steiner-Riley/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Michael Szerlog/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Lorraine Edmond/R10/USEPA/US@EPA, Judy Smith/R10/USEPA/US@EPA
Date: 08/31/2012 09:56 AM
Subject: A little perspective from 1892

This article form the Transactions of the American Fisheries Society in 1892 was recommended by one of our public reviewers. It is a poignant reminder of why we are putting so much effort into Bristol Bay.

A National Salmon Park - 1892.pdf



Transactions of the American Fisheries Society
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/utaf20

A National Salmon Park

Livingston Stone

Version of record first published: 09 Jan 2011

To cite this article: Livingston Stone (1892): A National Salmon Park, Transactions of the American Fisheries Society, 21:1, 149-162

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1577/1548-8659(1892)22[149:ANSP]2.0.CO;2

A NATIONAL SALMON PARK.

By Livingston Stone.

Who would have thought thirty years ago that the creation of a National Park in this country would be the means of rescuing the buffalo from extinction? Who thought then that anything was needed to rescue the buffalo? The buffalo roamed in myriads over the plains and mountain slopes of the central portions of the United States and were so innumerable that, with the exception of a few far-sighted persons, no one thought that this noble race of animals was even in danger. The supply seemed inexhaustible and the species at least safe from extinction.

How soon we found out our mistake, and how suddenly the change came. The note of alarm had hardly been sounded long enough to be distinctly comprehended over the country, before the buffalo was gone—all gone practically, except a few straggling survivors which, if they had not found refuge in Yellowstone Park, would have been gone too, long before this. The Yellowstone National Park saved them. It saved the wild race from extinction, and if nothing else should ever be accomplished by the creation of the Park, this alone would, in the writer's estimation, justify its existence.

But if anyone had said thirty years ago, "Let us form a National Park in the buffalo region for a protection and refuge for the buffalo," the proposition would have been laughed down from one end of the country to the other. It would have been thought a most ridiculous expedient, a scheme too foolish and crazy to be even seriously entertained. Nevertheless, the creation of the National Park has accomplished this very object, and has been, I think it may be safely said, the only means of accomplishing this most important object, the preservation of the American buffalo.

Now what this paper is going to propose will appear,

doubtless, just as ridiculous, just as foolish and crazy, as the formation of a park for the preservation of the buffalo would have been thought thirty years ago. It is nothing less than the creation of a national park for the preservation of our salmon.

I hear already from all directions the question, "What do the salmon need a park for? Are there not plenty of places of safety for them already in all the rivers and streams of this country, not to mention the pathless ocean where man cannot follow them?"

It looks so at first sight, I admit; but let us try to find these places of safety if they exist, and then see how it looks. We certainly cannot find them on the Atlantic coast, where the scanty yield of the only two American salmon rivers—the Kennebec and Penobscot—is only a drop in the bucket compared with the total consumption of salmon. Passing over to the Pacific coast we find only the Sacramento, the Columbia and the lesser streams on the Washington and Oregon coast, and in all these the salmon are about as safe as the fur seals were last year in Behring Sea.

I will say from my personal knowledge that not only is every contrivance employed that human ingenuity can devise to destroy the salmon of our West coast rivers, but more surely destructive, more fatal than all is the slow but inexorable march of those destroying agencies of human progress, before which the salmon must surely disappear as did the buffalo of the plains and the Indian of California. The helpless salmon's life is gripped between these two forces—the murderous greed of the fishermen and the white man's advancing civilization—and what hope is there for the salmon in the end? Protective laws and artificial breeding are able to hold the first in check, but nothing can stop the last.

To substantiate this statement, which may seem exaggerated, let me inquire what it was that destroyed the salmon of the Hudson, the Connecticut, the Merrimac

and the various smaller rivers of New England, where they used to be exceedingly abundant? It was not overfishing that did it. If the excessive fishing had been all there was to contend with, a few simple laws would have been sufficient to preserve some remnants, at least, of the race. It was not the fishing, it was the growth of the country, as it is commonly called, the increase of the population, necessarily bringing with it the development of the various industries by which communities live and become prosperous. It was the mills, the dams, the steamboats, the manufacturers injurious to the water, and similar causes, which, first making the streams more and more uninhabitable for the salmon, finally exterminated them altogether. In short, it was the growth of the country and not the fishing which really set a bound to the habitations of the salmon on the Atlantic coast.

Let me illustrate this same statement more in detail by presenting the testimony of the salmon rivers of the Pacific coast. Take for an example the Sacramento. When the first rush of Gold seekers came to California in 1849, every tributary to the Sacramento was a fruitful spawning ground for salmon and into every tributary countless shoals of salmon hastened every summer to deposit their eggs. When the writer went to California in 1872, only twenty-three years later, not one single tributary of the Sacramento of any account was a spawning ground for the salmon except the McCloud and Pit rivers in the extreme northern part of the State, where the hostility of the Indians had kept white men out. It was not fishing by any means that had caused the disappearance of the salmon, for the miners did very little fishing in those times; but it was the debris from the quartz mines which drove the salmon out, ruining the spawning grounds and rendering the river uninhabitable for the salmon.

This was in 1872. In 1878 the writer took 14,000,000 of salmon eggs from the summer run at the U. S. Sal-

mon Station on the McCloud river. In 1883 the Southern Pacific Railroad Co. (then the Central Pacific) extended their line northward up the Little Sacramento, crossing the mouth of Pit river, into which the McCloud empties a mile or two above.

So disastrous to the salmon was the effect of the road building along the Little Sacramento and the mouth of the Pit, that that year it was with great difficulty and only by very hard work that we succeeded in getting barely 1,000,000 salmon eggs, and the next year Prof. Baird, in disgust at what he considered the unpardonable indifference of the Californians, discontinued taking salmon eggs at this station. Since that time sawmills of immense capacity have been erected at the head of the Little Sacramento and the McCloud, and have done very effective work in increasing the now alarming scarcity of the spawning salmon of the Sacramento.

I think these instances are sufficient to show that what the friends of the salmon have to fear more than overfishing, is the growth or development of the country always attendant upon an increasing population, but the fatal consequences of which to the salmon it is impossible to avoid. Nothing can stop the growth and development of the country, which are fatal to the salmon. For instance, there was no power in the world that could have prevented the mining on the Feather, the Yuba, the American Fork or the other spawning streams of the salmon; nothing could have stopped the building of the railroad up the Little Sacramento or the erection of the Sawmills on the upper McCloud. They came along naturally and inevitably in the march of events, and they could not be withstood; and nothing was left for the salmon but to suffer the consequence and disappear as by a decree of fate.

Now actual fishing in the salmon streams can be regulated by law and rendered comparatively harmless, but the country will continue to grow more and more populous and

the fatal march of civilization will proceed as irresistibly as ever. That cannot be held back, and unsafe as the salmon are now in our Atlantic and Pacific coasts rivers, they will become more and more unsafe every year; all of which goes to show that there is no safe place for the salmon within the limits of the United States proper.

This leaves us only Alaska. Now, how is it with the salmon streams of Alaska? Not even there are the salmon safe. Countless myriads of salmon formerly filled all the rivers and streams of the long Alaskan coast, and they were nearly 2,000 miles from the destroying hand of civilized man, but they were not safe even on those distant shores. The ubiquitous canneryman found them, and he already has his grip on the best and most fruitful of the Alaskan rivers. The pressure of the world's demand on the world's supply of canned salmon renders it necessary for the salmon canner to occupy more distant and less fruitful fields every year, and it is only a question of time when all the Alaskan salmon streams are given over to the canneries, and when that time comes no one will claim, I think, that the salmon are safe in Alaska.

One or two illustrations are sufficient. The Karluk River on Kodiak Island is probably the most wonderful salmon river in the world. On Aug. 2, 1889, the cannery nets caught on Karluk beach at the mouth of the river, 153,000 salmon by actual count. A short time after, the writer went up the Karluk River in a bidarka—the skin boat of the natives—expecting to see myriads of salmon spawning and thousands on their journey to the spawning grounds, but instead of the wonderful sight we anticipated, our whole party, I think, saw less than a dozen in the river till we reached the lower spawning grounds, and then to our astonishment we saw only a few scattering fish spawning, such as one might expect to see in the most commonplace salmon river in the world; 153.000 salmon caught in one day at the mouth of the river, and none to speak of going up the river to reproduce their

species. Every one can draw his own inference, The fact is significant enough.

On another river, a large one, the Nushagak, where vast numbers of salmon were taken at the mouth one summer for canning, we were told that the succeeding winter the natives living up the river were brought to the verge of starvation because the salmon which they had always depended on for their winter's food were so scarce. Of the thousands and thousands of salmon that usually ascend the river to spawn, not enough spawners escaped the nets at the mouth to keep the natives on the upper waters from starving. This fact speaks for itself also.

So much for the safety of salmon in Alaska in general, but it would yet seem that on the uninhabitable shores of the Arctic Ocean the salmon might find a place of refuge, but not even there can they stay unmolested, for parties were planning three years ago, the writer was told, to establish canneries on the affluents of the frigid and forbidding Arctic. So we see that our salmon are not safe even in Alaska, their last refuge, and if not there, they are not safe anywhere within the limits of our broad land.

But now the question comes up, "Will not protective laws and artificial breeding make the salmon secure enough?" My answer is that good laws and artificial breeding will do a good deal toward it, but not enough. Good laws can prevent overfishing, but no laws can arrest the encroachments on the salmon rivers of increasing populations and their consequent fatal results to the salmon. No laws could possibly have been enacted which for instance would have stopped the manufacturing enterprises on the Connecticut, or the vast water traffic of the great metropolis at the mouth of the Hudson which doubtless drove the salmon out of these rivers. Protective laws may regulate the salmon fishing of the Sacramento, but no laws can stop the mining, the

logging and the railroad building that are destroying the spawning grounds of the tributaries of the Sacramento. It is not in the power of law enactments to save the salmon from all their dangers.

Artificial breeding can do a great deal, and has done a great deal, but it cannot be relied upon for a certainty. In the first place it is very uncertain where one can find a suitable place for hatching salmon. The writer traveled over four thousand miles up and down the Columbia and its tributaries, from the Continental divide to the Pacific coast looking for a good place for salmon hatching, first in 1877 for the Oregon and Washington cannerymen, and afterwards in 1883 for the U. S. Fish Commission, and found only two places in that great stretch of country which were suitable, one on the Clackamas River where the writer built a hatching station, and the other on the Little Spokane a few miles from Spokane Falls, which is still unoccupied.

There is in all the great State of California but one stream suitable for salmon hatching on a large scale, and on this stream, strange as it seems, there is but one spot that meets all the requirements of the case, and that is the place that the writer selected and built upon, on the McCloud River in 1872, and named Baird, in honor of the distinguished Commissioner, under whose direction the work was done.

Allow me to add by way of conformation that subsequently the State Fish Commission of California, after hunting all over the State for another place for hatching salmon, have given it up and now get their supply of salmon eggs from the Government station at Baird.

The above instances illustrate the difficulty of finding suitable places for hatching salmon on a large scale, and not only is it not easy to find such places, but they cannot be relied upon to a certainty when they are found, for they are always in danger from logging, mining, railroad building, lumber manufacturing and other

causes which yearly become more imminent and dangerous as the country gets settled up and the population increases, and which threaten at any time to destroy their efficiency.

We must come to the conclusion then that even with the help and support of protective laws and artificial breeding, our salmon, like the buffalo of thirty years ago, are not safe. The destroying agencies of advancing civilization drove the buffalo to the last ditch, so to speak, and then the last survivors, or almost the last, were slain. They were obliged from sheer necessity to come to feed. where from all directions the hand of man was raised against them. Whether they turned to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west, they went to their certain death, and in an incredibly short space of time they practically disappeared.

The story of our salmon is analogous. They are obliged to come inland to breed. They are compelled from sheer necessity to come up the rivers into the very midst of their human enemies. They cannot stay in the ocean like other fishes of the sea, where they are safe from the hand of man, but they must necessarily come, one might say, into his very grasp, and, like the buffalo, whether they turn to the north, south, east or west, they go into the very jaws of death ; for what hope is there for a salmon to escape after he has entered a river, if man chooses to employ his most effective agencies for his capture? There is none. The salmon is doomed. There is no alter of refuge for the salmon in this country any more than there was for the buffalo.

Ought not something be done, then? Ought this state of things to continue? The salmon of the United States are one of our most valuable posessions. As a matter of ordinary prudence, ought not the country to have some place, if it is possible, where the salmon can come and go in safety? If a stock raiser saw that his cattle were daily diminishing because they had no spot where they were

safe from beasts of prey, what kind of a man would we think he was if he did not very soon fix a place where they would be safe.

We should. to draw it mildly, think he was very improvident and negligent. Is it any less improvident and negligent for this country not to provide a place for its rapidly diminishing salmon where they will be safe? It seems to the writer that not a day ought to be lost, but that if it is possible to provide a place where our salmon can resort unharmed and remain safely their allotted time, it should be given them without hesitation. If there is such an asylum of refuge within our borders, by all means secure it for the salmon and let the salmon have it for an eternal heritage.

Is there such a place within the limits and jurisdiction of the United States? The writer can say from personal knowledge that there is one place at least. Most fortunately for us Americans there is in our Alaskan possessions just such a place as is wanted—probably more than one—and so exceptionately fortunate is America in this respect that it is not likely that this side of the frozen and uninhabited shores of the Arctic, it can be duplicated many times in the possessions of all the nations of the earth combined, which significant circumstance, allow me to add in passing, goes to show how near the world has reached the extreme limit of its salmon supply.

The locality which the writer has in mind is an Island in the North Pacific about 750 miles nearly due west of Sitka. Its name is Afognak, and it is the northernmost of the two largest islands of the group, called the Kadiak Islands. It lies just north of latitude 58° and between 152° and 153° west longitude. It is a small island. probably not over fifty miles across at its widest part, but there are several streams flowing from various points of the island to the surrounding ocean. and at the proper season contain salmon innumerable. It is no exaggeration to say that salmon swarm up these streams in countless

myriads. When the writer was on the island in 1889, the salmon was so thick in the streams that it was absolutely necessary in fording them to kick the salmon out of the way to avoid stumbling over them. I know that this story is an old salmon chestnut, but it illustrates as well as anything the wonderful abundance of salmon in the Afognak streams; and it can be easily believed when it is remembered that about a month earlier 153,000 salmon were caught in one day at the mouth of the Karluk, which is a river only 60ft. wide where it empties into the ocean. But there is no need of consuming time in proving the abundance of salmon at Afognak Island. It is a matter of record. The salmon are there in as great numbers as could be wished. All the varieties which also inhabit the Pacific Ocean come to Afognak. The list is as follows; it is a royal catalogue:

1. The red salmon, the "blue back" of the Columbia (*Oncorhynchus nerka*).
2. The king salmon, the "quinnat" or "spring salmon" of the Columbia (*Oncorhynchus chouica*).
3. The silver salmon, the "silversides" of the Columbia (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*).
4. The humpback salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*).
5. The dog salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*).
6. The steelhead, the "square tailed trout" of the tributaries of the Columbia (*Salmo gairdneri*, *Salmo truncatus*).
7. The Dolly Varden (*Salvelinus malma*).

It is easy to see what a paradise for salmon this island is, and what a magnificent place of safety it would be if it were set aside for a national park where the salmon could always hereafter be unmolested. But the abundance and variety of its salmon are not the only recommendations that Afognak Island has for a national park. It has several others which may be enumerated as follows:

1. The island is inhabitable all the year round, with a

comparatively even temperature. Although so far north. the winter's cold is not excessive, probably not equalling that of parts of New England. It is cooler than New England in the summer, it is true, but there is much less variation of temperature between summer and winter.

2. The rivers of Afognak still exist in all their original purity and fruitfulness. No overfishing has left them barren. No mills have polluted their primeval purity. No railroads have frightened the salmon away from them. No mining has disturbed their native spawning grounds. As salmon rivers they are still in their original glory. To quote a not inappropriate line of Byron, "Such as Creation's dawn beheld" them, they are rolling now. Consequently nothing need be done nor any expense incurred in putting the rivers in order for asylums of refuge for the salmon.

3. No complications now exist or can come up in future, in regard to land titles in this island. The United States Government owns the land already like the rest of Alaska, by direct purchase from Russia, and has never parted with any of its exclusive rights of ownership. No State or Territory, or company or individual owns an acre of it. Consequently the U. S. Government can set aside the island for any purpose whatever, without interfering with any prior rights or titles, or incurring any risk of litigation.* Alaska is already one great reservation.

4. The island will probably never be wanted for any thing else. The summer season is so short that no crops can be raised there, and it is not likely that for many generations, if ever, the land will be wanted by permanent settlers, and it is now inhabited only by a few Aleuts and half breed families who would not be interfered with. There would be no injustice done to individuals by making a reservation of the island.

* There are two canneries operating in the southern part of the island, but there would probably not be great difficulty in making satisfactory arrangements with them.

5. Last but not least, artificial hatching can be instituted there at any time, if it is ever thought best, and on a vast scale if desired; and unlimited numbers of the eggs of the various kinds of salmon noted above, can be obtained for distribution and sent to all other parts of the country where they may be needed.

The above considerations seem to indicate that Afognak Island possesses all the qualification required for a place of safety for our Pacific Ocean salmon without presenting any objections to its being reserved by the Federal Government for salmon, or in other words, converted into a National Salmon Park.

The writer, however, would not urge the claims of Afognak or any other place to this distinction as against those of any locality that may be found to be better fitted for it. This island has been brought forward merely as showing that one place at least is known that would answer the purposes of a salmon park. There are doubtless others in our Alaskan possessions. There are possibly better ones. If a better place can be found, let us take it. If not, let us take Afognak Island; but at all events let some place be selected and set aside by the authority of the National Government. If not Afognak Island, let it be some other place. Provide some refuge for the salmon, and provide it quickly, before complications arise which may make it impracticable, or at least very difficult. Now is the time. Delays are dangerous. Some unforeseen difficulties may come up which we do not dream of now, any more than we did a few years ago of logging on the Clackamas, or railroad building on the upper Sacramento.

If we procrastinate and put off our rescuing mission too long, it may be too late to do any good. After the rivers are ruined and the salmon are gone they cannot be reclaimed. Exaggerated as the statement seems, it is nevertheless true that all the power of the United States cannot restore the salmon to the rivers after the work of

destruction has been completed. The familiar nursery rhyme about the egg applies here with peculiar fitness:

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Could not set Humpty as before."

That is the whole thing, so to speak, in an eggshell. After the salmon rivers are ruined all the king's horses and all the king's men, that is to say, all the power of the government, "cannot set them as before."

Let us act then at once and try to do something for the salmon before it is too late. Dangerous complications may come suddenly upon us which we cannot foresee. How little we foresaw the danger to the buffalo and the fur seals. How suddenly the disastrous results came. Even if not impracticable it may cost large sums of money to do hereafter what may be done now for nothing. No expense may be incurred at present. All that is required is to have Afognak Island or some other suitable place set aside by national authority as Gen. Grant set aside the McCloud River Reservation during his administration, and it can be left to further events to decide whether it is expedient to expend any money on the reservation, a subject that can be safely left, we all know, in the hands of our efficient Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries. There seems to be no impropriety in the United States having a national salmon park, but on the contrary it appears eminently proper that a great natural salmon country like ours should have set apart some safe repository and fruitful breeding grounds for this noble fish.

Consider for a moment what the salmon has done for us, and then think how mercilessly we have treated him. Our salmon has been to us a source of national revenue, enjoyment and pride, and what return have we meted out to him? He has been hunted pitilessly with hooks and spears, with all kinds of nets and pounds, with wheels and guns and dynamite, and there is not a cubic foot of

water in the whole country where he can rest in safety. The moment he comes in from the ocean he meets the gill nets and the pounds at the mouth of the river, the sweep seines further up, and hook everywhere, and at last on his breeding grounds, which at least ought to be sacred to him, he encounters the pitchforks of the white man and the spears of the Indian.

Let us now at the eleventh hour, take pity on our long-persecuted salmon and do him the poor and tardy justice of giving him, in our broad land that he has done so much for, one place where he can come and go unmolested and where he can rest in safety.

Allow me to add in closing that it seems to me highly appropriate that this society, which represents with such intelligence and ability all the fishing interests of every kind in this country, should take the initiative in a matter in which those interests are so closely concerned. The writer trusts that it will, and ventures to predict that, if its efforts in that direction should happily be rewarded by the creation of a national salmon park, it would become an enduring monument to the usefulness of the Society that would last as long as the Nation lasts.